



# Fire Line

*News from Your Emergency Service Provider*



*In the spirit of our tradition, we strive for excellence, respectfully serving all with pride, honor and compassion.*

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF

### Emergency Medical Response: Providing Ambulance Service for 30 Years

San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District protects approximately 155 square miles of the southern portion of Contra Costa County. A large part of the emergency delivery services the District provides centers around the paramedic medical response and ambulance transportation system.

The emergency medical system this District provides is very effective and efficient. The District maintains an operational objective of achieving a response time, for the urban areas, of five minutes or less, ninety percent of the time. This is accomplished by crew members that cross-staff ladder trucks and second-run engines and the paramedic ambulances. Presently, the District has a fleet of five paramedic ambulances and maintains

four additional ambulances in reserve. Should the need arise, the reserve ambulances can be activated and made ready for immediate response.

This very important part of our District's history began thirty years ago. A tragic accident claimed the life of a young teenager named Helen Howell, who was struck by a car while crossing a street in Danville. Helen's death triggered a community-wide effort, initiated by her mother, Nina Howell, to purchase the District's first ambulance. (See the story on page 2.)

In the 1960s and early 1970s, prior to Helen Howell's unfortunate accident, the emergency medical response was very different than what we have today. While



the fire district provided emergency medical service; the actual transporting of patients was performed by private ambulance services. Many communities are still served by private ambulance companies who perform excellent work. Therefore, the events described here are not, in any way, meant to be a negative reflection upon the great work private companies perform. However, in this community during the 1970s, the private ambulance transportation system lacked the timely response desired by our citizens.

The accompanying story about Helen Howell shows how a very personal, very human story became an important piece of our local history and helped

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SRVFPD's Fleet of Emergency Response Vehicles

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initiate the innovative emergency medical response service upon which we depend today.

The present emergency medical system begins with detailed first aid instructions from the District's emergency 911 dispatchers to people at the scene. An immediate response from dedicated and skilled emergency responders follows. The patient is treated with advanced life support techniques and the emergency responder actively tends to their care all the way to the hospital.

Those of us who work as emergency responders in this valley, and the many people who have benefited from our emergency medical services, are very grateful for the

generosity and kindness the community demonstrated in starting the District's ambulance services. We also honor the family and friends who turned the tragic loss of Helen Howell into a positive and important essential service to the communities of the San Ramon Valley.

It is with great respect and gratitude that we recognize Helen Howell's legacy on this thirty-year anniversary.



*Craig Bowen*

Craig Bowen  
Fire Chief

SRVFPD's first ambulance.

## Helen Howell's Legacy

As remembered by Helen's brother and sister, Maurice Alcock and Diana Alcock Houts

*One day in 1973, Helen left home for an ordinary bike ride. That was the last time her family saw the carefree, happy teenager they knew and loved. When the phone rang, her brother answered it and heard, "This is the fire department, your sister has been in an accident and you need to get to the hospital." Their mother happened to be home that day, so they raced to John Muir Hospital and anxiously waited while Helen was treated and prepared for surgery. She never regained consciousness. Though Helen was in a coma, according to her sister there were days Helen made some progress and the family was hopeful that she would recover. While Helen lay comatose at John Muir, the family met with Dr. Anthony Berardino, a local doctor whose office was near the accident and who had been summoned to the scene by a firefighter. From Dr. Berardino the family learned what happened at the scene of the accident. An ambulance had been called, but unfortunately it took the wrong exit and went the wrong way. So, Helen was brought to the hospital in the back of a fire department pick-up with her head in Dr. Berardino's lap. Dr. Berardino shared with the family his adamant belief that the community needed their own ambulance.*

*Helen's brother said: "When I was a kid in grade school in Danville we had picture books that showed life in a typical American town. Every town had a mailman, an ice cream truck, a school bus, a fire truck, a milkman, and an ambulance. It never occurred to me that Danville didn't have an ambulance."*

*Helen passed away three weeks after the accident. Her sister said that while her parents were making the funeral arrangements the mortician suggested they request "donations be made to your favorite charity." Much to everyone's surprise, her mother said, "No, donations can be made to the Helen Howell Memorial Ambulance Fund." Mrs. Howell explained it was the least they could do for Dr. Berardino and the community, and she wanted to help make sure this would not happen again.*

*A small group from the community, including the editor of the Valley Pioneer, Dr. Berardino, Fire Chief Mike Blodgett and Helen's mother and step-father, Mr. and Mrs. Howell, formed a committee to raise money for an ambulance. Each week, the amount collected appeared on the front page of the Valley Pioneer newspaper.*

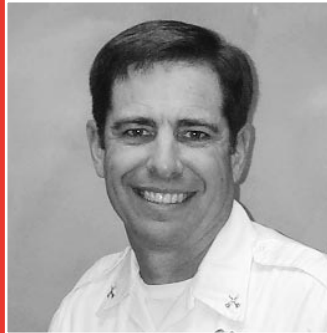
*Retired Battalion Chief Dave Gibson, who was on the scene that day, in June of 1973, was asked about his memory of the events: "This was a very defining incident in the change of the fire service." He recalled: "Following the incident, there was a lot of public pressure to have an ambulance service - Helen was very popular in school. Even kids brought in money to donate towards the ambulance fund. Money came in from everywhere." No money was used from the fire district's budget towards the purchase of the first ambulance. It was all donated money plus matching funds from the state.*

*Gibson stressed that Dr. Berardino deserves a lot of credit for implementation of the ambulance service.*

*In Service to the People Who Live in, Work in,  
and Visit Our Community*

**Boyd  
Clegg**

**Battalion Chief**



**Responsibilities**

*Mapping*

*Supervises Fire Companies*

Battalion Chief Boyd Clegg came up through the ranks at San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District from Firefighter to Engineer and then to Captain. In 1991, he was promoted to his current position of Battalion Chief.

Clegg began his fire service career in 1975 as a volunteer with the San Ramon Fire District. After acquiring his Emergency Medical Technician 1A, he attended the Twin Valley Fire Training Academy to obtain his Firefighter 1. In 1978, he was hired as a full time firefighter for the District.

Clegg's interests and duties within the District have included apparatus maintenance and repair, and currently involve District mapping. In addition, he is the Geo-Technical Information Systems Manager, a Senior Academy Instructor, an Auto Extrication Instructor, Rescue System 1 Instructor, and a member of the Rescue System Development Committee. For the last several years, he has served as a Command System Liaison working with San Ramon Regional Hospital and the Chevron/Texaco Corporation, assisting them with their emergency training and drills.

According to Battalion Chief Clegg he has been married 27 years to "a fabulous wife and they have three terrific young adult children." Outside the fire service, he enjoys many family activities, and most of them are centered around the outdoors. They include mountain biking, motorcycling, hiking, golf and almost any other activity that can be done outside the confines of a building. He is also a very serious home shop tinkerer and always has more projects on the burner than he could ever hope to finish.

**Michael  
Brown**

**Battalion Chief**



**Responsibilities**

*Facilities Maintenance*

*Supervises Fire Companies*

Battalion Chief Michael Brown began his fire service career 27 years ago in Southern California. His brother-in-law, who was a firefighter for the United States Forest Service, informed him that the U.S.F.S. was looking for people to work during the fire season. Mike applied and was hired within a few weeks. Brown said he knew right away that he was hooked and that firefighting would be his career. "There was so much to learn. Everyday was different and unpredictable. And the people you work with are incredible." Brown worked for the U.S.F.S. for four years before transferring to Treasure Island Naval Station in San Francisco, where he worked for six years. He was hired by San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District 17 years ago. Battalion Chief Brown progressed through the ranks from Firefighter, Engineer and Captain, before being promoted to Battalion Chief in 1999.

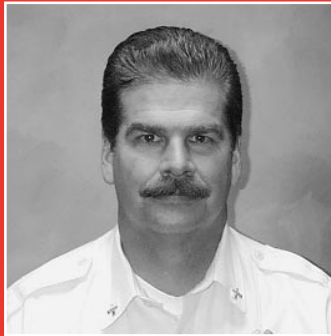
Like the other Battalion Chiefs, Brown supervises 13 fire companies and the Communication Center during his shift. He said, "I am proud to work with such a great group of people. This organization exists solely to serve the people who live in, work in, or visit the community and every member of the SRVFPD takes the task very seriously." Brown is in charge of the District's facilities maintenance, including 10 fire stations, 2 office buildings, and a 19th century school house. As part of the new Strategic Five Year Plan, he was recently assigned to analyze information flow within the fire district and devise plans to make communication more efficient and effective.

Brown grew up in Walnut Creek and now lives in Lafayette with his wife of 17 years and their 15 year old daughter.

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**Bert  
Byers**

*Battalion Chief*



## Responsibilities

*Staff Wellness-Fitness Program  
Supervises Fire Companies*

Battalion Chief Bert Byers was born and raised in Concord. His parents settled there in 1953 when his father began his practice as a family physician and surgeon.

After graduation from high school in 1972, and having drawn a high lottery number for the Viet Nam war draft, Byers entered college. He graduated from Sacramento State University in 1976 with a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice. Two weeks later, he entered the Police Academy and was later sworn in as a Concord Police Officer.

Byers' career in law enforcement spanned 14 years, including being a patrol officer, corporal and sergeant. He handled the first Rottweiler police dog in the western states. By the end of his law enforcement career, he was the department's Training Manager, K-9 Coordinator, SWAT Team Leader, Rangemaster and Reserve Officer Coordinator. Byers said, "I found public service rewarding and challenging. However, I wanted to shift into a more positive profession. Career counseling and aptitude testing led me to the fire service." In 1980, Byers earned a masters degree in Public Administration from Golden Gate University.

Battalion Chief Byers has been with SRVFPD for 14 years, including Captain for seven years and a Battalion Chief for the past two years. He serves on the Safety Committee and is project manager for the Wellness-Fitness and Performance Appraisal Committees.

Bert Byers is married and the father of three boys, ages 7, 16, & 18 years. His off-duty time is centered around family activities, including sports and getaways.



*As you sit down this winter with your hot chocolate and a soft cozy blanket, the last thing on your mind is probably your chimney safety. However, if you don't give it some thought now, you may not enjoy the rest of the winter.*

According to the Chimney Safety Institute of America, chimney fires don't have to happen. Here are some ways to avoid them:

- ✓ Use seasoned wood only in your fireplace. (Dryness is more important than hard wood versus soft wood considerations.)
- ✓ Build smaller, hotter fires that burn more completely and produce less smoke.
- ✓ Never burn cardboard boxes, wrapping paper, trash or Christmas trees in your fireplace; these can spark a chimney fire.
- ✓ Install stovepipe thermometers to help monitor flue temperatures in wood stoves so you can adjust burning practices as needed.
- ✓ Have the chimney inspected and cleaned on a regular basis.

## PROPER MAINTENANCE

Clean chimneys don't catch fire. Make sure that you sweep your chimney on an annual basis. Inspect your solid fuel venting system annually, and clean and repair it whenever needed. Listen to the advice of your chimney sweep who may have other maintenance recommendations depending on how you use your fireplace or stove.

**If you have further questions please contact San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District at 925-838-6600.**

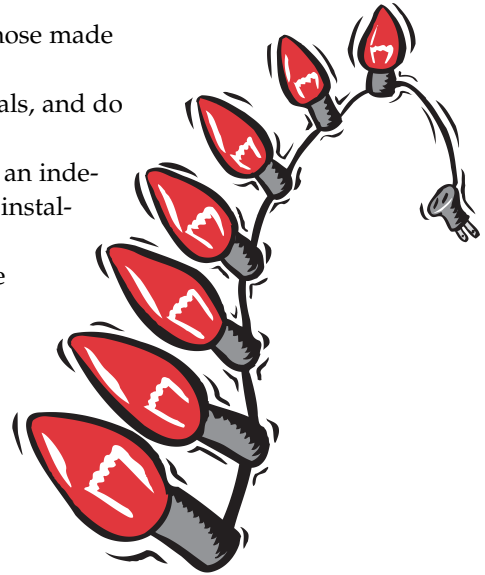


# HOLIDAY SAFETY TIPS

*The winter holidays are a time for celebration, and that means more cooking, home decorating, entertaining, and an increased risk of fire due to heating equipment. Here are some tips from the National Fire Protection Association ("NFPA") to help you and your family have a Safe Holiday Season.*

## HOLIDAY DECORATING & LIGHTING

- Use caution with holiday decorations. Whenever possible choose those made with flame-resistant, flame-retardant or non-combustible materials.
- Keep candles away from decorations and other combustible materials, and do not use candles to decorate Christmas trees.
- Purchase only lights and electrical decorations bearing the name of an independent testing lab, and follow the manufacturer's instructions for installation and maintenance.
- Carefully inspect new and previously used light strings and replace damaged items before plugging in lights.
- Do not overload extension cords.
- Always unplug lights before replacing light bulbs or fuses.
- Do not mount lights in any way that can damage the cord's wire insulation (i.e., use clips – not nails).
- Keep children and pets away from light strings and electrical decorations.
- Turn off all light strings and decorations before leaving the house or going to bed.



## HOLIDAY ENTERTAINING

- Unattended cooking is the leading cause of home fires in the U.S. When cooking for holiday visitors remember to keep an eye on the stove.
- Provide plenty of large, deep ashtrays and check them frequently.
- Cigarette butts can smolder in the trash and cause a fire, so completely douse cigarette butts with water before discarding, or flush them down the toilet.
- After a party, always check on, between and under upholstery and cushions, and inside trash cans for cigarette butts that may be smoldering.
- Keep matches and lighters up high and out of sight and reach of children (preferably in a locked cabinet). When smokers visit your home, ask them to keep their smoking materials with them so young children do not touch them.

*The San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District wants you and your family to be fire safe. Please feel free to contact the Fire Prevention Division at 925-838-6600 with questions or comments between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.*

## YOU Can Assist SRVFPD Firefighters' Training

Do you have a structure that you no longer want? Are you planning to demolish a building in order to build something new? Consider contributing the structure to the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District (a qualified charitable organization) for use in training employees in fire suppression methods and tactics. Please call (925) 838-6620 for more information.

# MUSTER Held September 21st

San Ramon Valley Firefighters Association hosted our valley's first Muster on September 21st at Oak Hill Park and Monte Vista High School. The Muster, which was chaired by Karen Stepper, Danville Town Councilwoman, was a fun family event that featured competitions, exhibits and demonstrations, all in the name of safety. Several privately owned antique fire engines and ambulances were displayed, the SRVFPD Honor Guard performed, and children and adults took part in bucket brigades, hose relays, and water barrel shoots. According to Chris Suter, Assistant Fire Chief, "A lot of water was thrown and a lot of people were happy to get wet as a relief from the 100° temperature of the afternoon."



## Fire Line

Published semi-annually by  
San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District as a  
public service to the residents in our District.

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**Emergencies DIAL 911**

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